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SUBJECT: PM MELES TO DAS YAMAMOTO: STAY ENGAGED ON THE
BORDER

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. DAS Yamamoto and party met with Prime Minister Meles for over two hours on March 30. Meles asked the U.S. to stay engaged on the border "for the long term;" reiterated that dialogue is needed for lasting peace; and said that Ethiopia is "uncomfortable" with the Ethiopian-Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC) as there is no roadmap for demarcation. Ethiopia has not yet decided if it will participate in April 29 EEBC meeting but remains engaged in looking forward to a durable solution. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) DAS Yamamoto, accompanied by AF/E advisor Bill Schofield, INR geographer Ray Milesky, Charge Huddleston and DCM (notetaker) spent over two hours with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on March 30, primarily focusing on the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Acting Director of Europe and America Almaz Amha also attended. DAS Yamamoto commended Ethiopia for its participation in the March 10 EEBC meeting, saying that it changed people's minds about Ethiopia's commitment to resolve the border, energized the EEBC commissioners and will help to leverage additional resources for the EEBC to complete its work. The U.S. recognizes that technical negotiations are part of the process and that coherent, logical discussions are needed to resolve issues of demarcation, to include such issues as displaced persons. DAS Yamamoto said that demarcation must result in durable peace and not plant the seeds of future conflict. The U.S. wants to bring both sides together to work on both the technical and human aspects of demarcation. Gen. Fulford's role as a technical expert is to assist the parties and to help them address specific land, water and property rights issues as the border is demarcated. DAS Yamamoto described U.S. engagement as a final chance to reach durable peace along the border.

13. (C) INR geographer Milesky projected the flyover video for PM Meles who pointed out some of the areas where the EEBC made mistakes, such as at the confluence of two rivers or in the location of a mountain, which led to further mistakes as the delimitation line was drawn. The PM also commented on villages that were Eritrean but had been given to Ethiopia and vice versa, and stated that some areas were militarily rather than socially significant for Ethiopia. According to the PM, the EEBC decision exacerbated problems that already existed and then seemed to blame Ethiopia for some of its mistakes. The EEBC in making its delimitation decision wanted both sides to win, the PM said, and so some land was given to each party; however, they chose the wrong land in

some cases. The result was an "uninformed" decision that mixed technical and political aspects, according to the PM. Nevertheless, he said, any logical person could solve this in 24 hours; but a logical person is needed (referring to lack of Eritrean engagement.)

¶4. (C) The PM said that the Ethiopian objective is to keep the U.S. in play on the border issue, and this is why Ethiopia participated in the March 10 EEBC meeting. However, its silence at the meeting should not have been construed as concurrence; rather, Ethiopia preferred to keep silent and speak up only when useful to advance the process. Ethiopia is not comfortable with the EEBC. According to Meles, the "big hole" is Eritrea which is not present at the table and is not likely to be present soon. What is the point of EEBC meetings if there is no interlocutor, Meles asked. Political will is needed to move forward, he said, as both parties have the technical knowledge and know the terrain. But there are risks for Ethiopia in moving forward, he added. We can't trust the EEBC process without a roadmap and without a commitment from the Eritrean side for dialogue. If Ethiopia participates in the EEBC meeting at end of April, it will make clear that demarcation is not possible without commitment to dialogue, Meles said.

¶5. (C) Nevertheless, Meles said, no one can force the parties to agree; even U.S. engagement does not guarantee success. However, only the U.S. can provide Isaias with "a ladder to climb down." Isaias can change, eventually, but he can't be forced to do so. Thus, there is no short term fix, Meles said, and we will go along with anything that might lead to peace. We want the U.S. commitment to be engaged for long term; and we want U.S. the commitment on dialogue for normalization, Meles stated.

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¶6. (C) DAS Yamamoto underlined that the April 29 EEBC meeting would be a political meeting and needs political representation from both sides. This meeting is essential before the team of surveyors begin their work, he said. Both sides will need to discuss and resolve problem areas; aircraft and especially helicopters must be allowed to fly over the area in order to do the work; and the neutral zone must be respected, with no military build up.

¶7. (C) PM Meles asked if, assuming that Gen. Fulford were to facilitate a meaningful discussion, and the survey took place based on the basis of a roadmap, would technical discussions be deferred until the survey work is completed or would issues be resolved as the work progressed? DAS Yamamoto responded that at the April meeting the parties themselves could decide on a common mechanism to use to resolve such issues. Gen. Fulford assists by bringing the weight of the U.S. and the international community to bear, and the EEBC can provide adjudication. Schofield added that Fulford can expand technical talks in order to resolve issues. The challenge, Meles asserted, is to have technical discussions that lead to the ultimate prize: lasting peace. This cannot be imposed from the outside, he added; we (the parties) have to want it. Technical decisions may be perfect, he said, but may not lead to peace. The starting point is political will. For Ethiopia there are risks: it can't trust the EEBC as it has made mistakes in the past; the entire process lacks a roadmap; and there is no commitment on the Eritrean side for dialogue. It would seem that we will "stumble into" talks. Meles said that Ethiopia would not go into talks where the EEBC makes the ultimate decisions. If there is no commitment to dialogue at the London talks, Meles said, there is no point in doing a survey or discussing technical issues. Ethiopia will have to say "no," and in that case it is preferable to say so early on so as not to raise unrealistic expectations, Meles said.

¶8. (C) DAS Yamamoto again stressed that demarcation must lead to lasting peace. Neither the U.N. nor the

international community want another war. There must be a permanent solution; fundamental causes must be addressed. There is a commitment to find that sustainable peace by the U.S., the EEBC, and the international community. It must include discussions on technical issues and normalization.

¶9. (C) PM Meles stated that should Ethiopia go to London it will make clear to the EEBC and to Eritrea that it is not possible to go forward without a commitment to dialogue. Ethiopia is committed to demarcation; it accepts delimitation despite its problems; the way forward is based on dialogue. This is the only reason to go to London, Meles said. Otherwise the meeting will be "a blind alley" in which "we're going to pay more."

¶10. (C) DAS Yamamoto assured PM Meles that the U.S. is committed to assisting the parties to address the problems of demarcation. It may be possible to define a clear roadmap through private Ethiopia-Eritrea-U.S. talks. Meles responded that the road map to peace is a "red line:" no one can force us; real commitment is needed from both sides. Playing chicken with Isaias doesn't work; don't anger or appease him. He can't be punished or bribed. Don't use all your guns now; sooner or later Isaias will make up his mind and then everything can be done. Eritreans are not our enemies. We are not out to get Isaias as we have no energy to spare on this. The U.S. should not take his antagonisms personally; he has nothing against the U.S. but wants to irritate you. He has no influence on Ethiopia now; we will not respond in kind to his game. When he gets down to his last card he will come to his senses.

¶11. (C) Comment. Although Meles remains wary of the EEBC process, he is engaged in looking forward to resolution of the border. Meles indicated his willingness for Ethiopia to attend the April 29 London meeting. The clear "roadmap" for Ethiopia is "technical discussions" to resolve displaced person issues and property/water rights, and "normalization talks" by the witnesses to resolve the causes of war and build trust, the former led by General Fulford and the latter by the U.S. Meles is still wary of the process and fears that Ethiopia may lose more in an undefined process. Nevertheless he will stay engaged with the U.S. as an

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interlocutor, at least for the time being.

¶12. (U) DAS Yamamoto cleared this cable.

HUDDLESTON